

Almost \$9 trillion in debt. I just came back from a month in my district, as Mr. ROSS had indicated, going to see constituent after constituent, talking about issues of critical importance to them. And I met a good friend of mine named Jim Fleming from LaPorte, Indiana. And Jim's company makes defense aerospace products. And he said, JOE, we try everything we can. We employ hundreds of people. We work extraordinarily hard. And, JOE, we get beat out by China on bid after bid. Not even competitive with our prices but below our cost of production. And, JOE, what saddens me so much, Mr. Fleming said, is that we have over \$1 trillion in debt to China. So I know when it is time for you to stand up, it is only made more difficult because of the debt that we have, a debt that we assumed because it was easier to do than to make the hard choices like the PAYGO system that we put in.

We look at Iraq now. We have lost \$12 billion that came in in currency in a plane, shrink wrapped, Mr. DAVIS, on pallets, never to be seen again once it came off of that plane. Think of what \$12 billion could have done in help creating the Hoosier Heartland Highway in my district.

We paid a gentleman Ahmed Chalabi and his group, the Iraqi National Congress, \$300,000 every month for information that they basically made up in the back room over a Coca-Cola.

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Just one more example: instead of probing and finding the answers, we just threw money away. And, Mr. ROSS, think of what \$300,000 could do in your district every month, or to my good friend, who you will see, Mr. Michael Arcuri, in his district in Utica. \$300,000 could provide health care for an incredible amount of Americans.

So we have come to this Congress to try to make sure, through our PAYGO system, that the debt goes no higher, that we start to reduce it, that in Iraq we get answers, answers that, instead of letting \$12 billion disappear, that those funds be used either in our district, or to provide up-armored Humvees and MRAP vehicles that will save our soldiers lives. Appropriate armored vests, the kind of things that will protect our soldiers, not feather someone else's nest.

Mr. ROSS, I'm proud to stand here with you tonight and have this opportunity.

Mr. ROSS. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. DONNELLY. Absolutely, sir.

Mr. ROSS. You mentioned something that really piqued my interest, and that is making sure that we are providing our soldiers with the best technology in armored vests. And I want to thank you for raising that this evening.

I've got a constituent in my district whose son is getting ready to go back for the second time, Arkansas National Guard, 39th Brigade, being asked to go back for a second time. And when you

sign up for the National Guard, you're supposed to spend 1 year out of 5, and now they were there in 2003 and 2004, they're being asked to go back again by Christmas of this year or early next year. And he raises a very important issue. This is a constituent from Garland County in Percy, Arkansas, near Hot Springs, and that is, he wants to ensure that our men and women in uniform, his son, has the best armored body gear and protection available. There are a lot of tests going on right now; there is a lot of debate going on. There have been hearings on this in the Congress. But 5 years into this war you would think, if our government, if this administration is sending \$16 million an hour of your tax money to Iraq, the very least they could do is ensure that our brave men and women, our soldiers that do everything that is asked of them, have the very best in body gear and protection.

Mr. DONNELLY. There is no question, Mr. ROSS, that when we look at our soldiers, nothing but the best is acceptable.

As you mentioned the soldiers in your district, we just had, about three weeks ago, our South Bend, Indiana, National Guard unit head over to some of the most dangerous duty in Iraq. And, again, they went with their pride and with a determination to do well. And our job, my job, your job is to make sure they have the very, very best. And it's not appropriate to see money disappear, to see it wasted at the tune of \$300,000 a month it was. To some gentleman who is making up stories in the back room when we think he's providing information. Our job is to make sure that the young men and women of Arkansas, New York, Indiana, Delaware, Pennsylvania and all our States have the very, very best armored equipment, armored vehicles. Their safety and their return home to their loved ones is the utmost importance.

Mr. ROSS. I thank the gentleman. And he makes some very good points.

And regardless of how you feel about what's going on in Iraq, and I personally have voted three times for a new direction in Iraq, but one of the things that I think we can all agree on is that we need more accountability for how our tax money is being spent in Iraq. And we need to ensure that money is going to provide our men and women in uniform with the very best equipment that's available to them today, not what was the best equipment 5 years ago, but what is the best equipment today to best protect them as they perform their duty and service to our country. And that's one thing that we can all agree on.

At this time, I'm pleased to introduce another fellow Blue Dog, a new Member in his first term in the 110th session of Congress who is rapidly and quickly becoming very involved and immersed in the fiscal issues of the Blue Dog Coalition, and that's my friend, Mr. MIKE ARCURI from New

York's 24th Congressional District, who just returned from a trip to Iraq.

Mr. ARCURI. I thank my friend from Arkansas for yielding, and I would like to thank you for what you do for the Blue Dog Caucus.

You know, the thing that first attracted me to the Blue Dog Caucus was the fact that they believe so strongly in fiscal responsibility in the pay-as-you-go idea, and the fact that we have to tighten our belt, we have to make some very difficult decisions. It's not easy when there are things that we need for our district and things that we know we need here domestically, and yet we can't spend more than we have. And it's no different than we would in our own home. You don't buy things that we can't afford. We can't enact legislation, we can't create bureaucracies that we can't pay for. And that's why I'm so proud to be a member of the Blue Dog Caucus.

I did just return from Iraq just a few days ago. And I couldn't help, while I was there, noticing immediately the amount of money that we have spent in Iraq. You know, when you look at the fact that you ride along and you see that we have literally created, built whole cities in the middle of the desert, in the middle of this expansive environment we have actually created cities and the amount of money, the amount of cement, the amount of wood that we've used to build these bases and the amount of material that we have there. I can remember that in one of the bases we pulled up to one area, it was huge, and there was nothing but electric transformers in a huge field; and those were transformers that they were using to put new electric and bring new power to different places in Iraq. And then we drove a little further and there was another area with nothing but Humvees and another area with nothing but bulldozers. And you can't help but realize just how much money and how much time and expense we're expending to rebuild Iraq.

And during the course of our conversation while we were there, we were talking about some of the things to one of the members of the military, one of the things that they needed there. And I couldn't help but think back in my district in upstate New York, back in Utica, there are things that we need that we don't have. We need improvements to our airport that we don't have. We need improvements to our roads. And much like your district in Arkansas, we have been waiting for a connection between Utica and the city of Binghamton, a Route 12 extension. We've been waiting for years and years, since before I was born, for that; and still we talk about it. And yet we spend billions of dollars. You quoted the figure \$16 million an hour we are spending in Iraq. We continue to spend it, and we've been doing it for years and years.

And while we continue to spend that money, we continue to spend resources that are critical to us while countries like China are continuing to invest